



“Thou shalt guide me with day counsel, and afterward receive me to glory,”
Psalm 73:24.

God's Abiding Presence

Lesson Aim: To enable the believer to gain a proper perspective of God's dealing with man.

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Why do the wicked prosper while the righteous seem to suffer lack? Has that question ever bothered you? If so, you are not alone. It has plagued multitudes through countless centuries. There is no information as to when the question first arose. It was a problem at least a thousand years before Christ. Fortunately, the Bible has an answer to the question.

King David, the psalmist who was “the sweet singer of Israel,” wrestled with the problem of the prosperity of the wicked. God's Holy Spirit directed him to a right conclusion and inspired him to express his thoughts in two beautiful psalms, one of which is the text for today's study. You will be greatly profited, if you will give careful study to both Psalm 37 and 73.

Today's study aims “to enable the believer to gain a proper perspective of God's dealing with man.” Certain principles underlie the study. (1) God deals with both saved and unsaved. (2) God deals justly with all men. (3) Men may not understand God's dealings with them at the time they happen. (4) Justice will triumph.

It is true that non-Christians are sometimes more prosperous in material wealth than some Christians. Is there any explanation for that fact? Yes. God nowhere promises that Christian faith will assure material wealth. He does promise to see that the Christian has all he needs for life and godliness. Moreover, the vindication of righteousness and the punishment of wickedness are not completed in this life. Do not judge by present and temporary circumstances.

I. FOOLISH ENVY, 73:1-3

A. Envy forgets God's goodness, verse 1. Does it appear that God does not deal fairly with His children? Could that be the reason why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? No, not at all. On the contrary, **“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.”** His dealings with His own are pure, unadulterated good. He cannot be unjust in His dealing with them.

Envy forgets that truth. It is born in a spirit of self-pity. It is nurtured in an environment of doubt. It causes one to question the blessing of God. How tragic. Charles H. Spurgeon taught men to pray, “O my God, however perplexed I may be, let me never think ill of thee. It must be so, it cannot be otherwise, thou art good to those whom thou hast made good: where thou hast renewed the heart thou wilt not leave it to its enemies.”

See this, then, as the foundation stone upon which you will stand. “Truly God is good . . . to such as are of a clean heart.”

B. Envy causes stumbling, verse 2. Appearances do not prove that God gives only unmixed good to His own. It seems that the very opposite is true: the Lord is good to the wicked and neglects the righteous. Such thoughts (sinful as they are) will lead one into sin, if they are long entertained.

The psalmist pictured himself almost slipping into sin from the envy stirred within him. He used the figure of a person walking on a sheet of ice. He steps with care, but each step threatens his safety lest his feet fly from under him and he fall to the ground. Such is the danger of an envious spirit. Envy brings stumbling and a fall.

C. Envy is aroused by wrong values, verses 3-15. Envy seems to magnify benefits and to ignore the problems of the one who is envied. It causes the unrighteous to appear to live a long life and to die with ease. It makes them appear free from troubles which plague other men. It makes them seem to be filled with pride which is never humbled and to do acts of violence without suffering punishment. The unrighteous seem to “have more than heart could wish.” Even their words of reproach against God appear to go unjudged, and they continue to prosper.

The good man who envies the wicked may well conclude, **“Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning,”** verses 13-14. The complaint is, “It does me no good to be a just person. I would be better off, if I did not try to serve and please God.”

How foolish! The wicked are not surrounded by good and profit. They have great distress of heart. God said through one of His prophets, **“But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,”** Isaiah 57:20-21.

Do not envy the wicked. They may seem to prosper and to be at peace, but they have troubles of which you are not aware.

II. SOLEMN REALIZATION, 73:16-22

A. Spiritual insight is gained in God's presence, verses 16-17. Great distress of mind follows upon the seething anguish brought by a consideration of the prosperity of the wicked in the midst of their rejection of God. There is an unsolvable riddle in the prosperity of the wicked. One can reject all thought of a just God; he can identify himself with the wicked and hope for their seeming prosperity; or he can seek an explanation of the riddle in the presence of God. The psalmist gained insight by seeking God.

When attention turns from earth to heaven, anxiety ceases; and discord resolves itself into harmony. Earthly vision is so limited that no one can judge aright upon its basis. Get the view from God's perspective, and all falls into an order which vindicates righteousness and judges evil. Do you have a problem which is beyond your solving? Seek the answer in the presence of God. Spiritual insight is gained in God's presence.

B. Spiritual insight reveals coming judgment upon sin, verses 18-20. If there were no heaven to gain or hell to shun, the course of the wicked might seem preferable to earthy man. Look at things from the standpoint of eternity, however, and it will be quite clear that “it is not all of life to have lived, nor all of death to have died.”

Do not envy the wicked man with his prosperity. His feet are standing in slippery places. He will fall and be cast down to destruction which will be all the more terrible as he remembers his earthly prosperity. Without warning and without escape, he will fall headlong without a moment to prepare. Who will envy him then? No one! Why envy him now, knowing that will be his end?

“They owe their existence and prosperity to the forbearance of God, which the Psalmist compares to a sleep (verse 20); but as a dream vanishes so soon as a man awakes, so the instant the Lord begins to exercise his justice and call men before him, the pomp and prosperity of proud transgressors shall melt away . . . Let them flaunt their little hour, poor unsubstantiated sons of dreams; they will soon be done; when the day breaketh, and the Lord awakes as a mighty man out of his sleep, they will

vanish away. Who cares for the wealth of dreamland? Who indeed but fools? Lord, leave us not to the madness which covets unsubstantial wealth, but ever teach us thine own wisdom”—Spurgeon.

C. Spiritual insight reveals the advantage of the righteous, verses 21-22. To envy a man is to aspire to be like him. How strange, then that a righteous man would ever envy a wicked man. Such a frame of mind will pierce a person through with many sorrows. It will poison one's life. A man is a fool (thoughtless) to envy the wicked.

The advantages of the righteous far outweigh the benefits which come to the wicked. Remember Psalm 1? The ungodly has his “counsel,” the sinner has his “way,” and the scornful has his “seat,” but the righteous man has his manifold “blessednesses” from God. Which place would you prefer to occupy? Let God teach you not to envy the wicked.

III. BELIEVER'S PRIVILEGE, 73:23-28

It is impossible to enumerate all the advantages which come to the child of God. A partial list, however, would be profitable in that it can open the mind to an appreciation of God's grace and encourage a personal listing of other benefits which each believer can call to mind.

A. Continual presence — “**Nevertheless. I am continually with thee . . .**,” verse 23. Jesus promised obedient Christians, “**. . . I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,**” Matthew 28:20. There is no need for any believer to be filled with a spirit of covetous envy. He can be content whatever his state in life. God has said, “**. . . I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,**” Hebrews 13:5.

B. Personal fellowship — “**. . . thou hast holden me by my right hand,**” verse 23. What a privilege! God's love embraces you. God's power upholds you! God is with you—not in some impersonal and detached way. He holds your right hand!

C. Special guidance — “**Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel . . .**,” verse 24.1. Therein lies an expression of confident faith. The psalmist tried to reason out the ways of God, as paradoxical as they appeared, but he ended in utter confusion. He came into God's presence and was overwhelmed by the divine wisdom and majesty. He surrendered all right to question God's ways. He yielded himself completely to the divine plan. Surrendering the right to choose his own way, he put his hand into the Father's hand, asking to be led, and agreeing to follow. Claim your divine right.

D. Eternal home — “**. . . and afterward receive me to glory,**” verse 24. The present may not be ideal. There may be problems for which one

finds no answer. It may seem even that the laws of right and wrong may be reversed. The present can be cheerfully endured, if there is a bright prospect for the future. What a future awaits the people of God!

E Devotional relationship — “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee,” verse 25. Behold what an exchange had come in the attitude of the psalmist. At first, he was envious of the wicked and wished that their prosperity might be his. He was so caught up in envy that heaven and God were largely forgotten. Then he went into the sanctuary of God. Suddenly in His presence all values reversed, and he saw things aright. Worldly wealth suddenly appeared as mere glitter. God was better to him than all else.

F. Sufficient strength — “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever,” verse 26. Life is a test of strength. Apart from God, man is unable to meet the test. There is nothing on the outside (flesh) or on the inside (heart) which would be sufficient. Flesh and heart had already failed the psalmist. They would fail him again. No man's resources are in himself.

G. Preferred advantage — “But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God . . .” verse 28.

Draw near to God. What a holy privilege! If men consider it an honor to be influential men upon earth, how much greater the privilege of an audience with the sovereign of the universe! It is “good” to draw near to God. It is good for all saints, under all circumstances, with all needs to come near to God. **“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you,”** James 4:8. Keep your trust in the Lord God, too. Draw near to Him often, and you will know great profit.